

Rap and Hip Hop

So, I read Langston Hughes and I admire and I listen to Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. I hear Louis Armstrong singing "Why Am I So Black and Blue" and I hear Billie Holiday singing "Strange Fruit". I notice how the Harlem Renaissance reverberated from black America to white America and the Beatniks gathered in clubs slamming their poetry over a jazzy beat and I heard the recordings of old rhyming Muhammad Ali in the days before he took that name singing "Stand by Me" and telling "Little Miss Beatnik go sit in your seatnik". I heard the recording of Gil Scott-Heron telling the world that "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" and James Brown saying loud "I'm Black and I'm Proud" and I see that poetry doesn't have to be some abstract obscurity wandering lonely as a cloud to where the daffodils are. I see that poetry can be powerful and meaningful and really genuinely actual change things in the world and I love it.

I'm an old, awkward, embarrassing white British man and I know that I'm not clever enough or young enough or black enough to be Hip Hop but I do love it and loving it is my way of doing it.

On quite a few occasions over the years people have told me that I don't like Hip Hop and when I ask them why they think that they have no rational answer. They assumed. They assumed and their assumption pisses me off.

Back in the 1990s two of the records I had in my collection were "The Score" by The Fugees and "Jazzmatazz" by G.U.R.U. but still people thought I wouldn't like Hip Hop. I don't know why.

Anyway, even though I'm not talented and clever enough to do Rap as a performer I can still experiment with poetry over a beat. I've made several attempts to make "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot into something which will sound like rap.

I mean, obviously, it isn't the same thing but this is my nonsense and my folly, to mess around with ideas which are somewhere way out of any normal common sense.

I once did an album on which attempted to combine T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" with The Who's "Baba O'Reilly" and somehow make it close enough to be recognisable but, at the same time, far enough away to avoid copyright infringement. So that's me. Mad as a hatter. Like Samuel Beckett said "Try again. Fail again. Fail better".